TEACHING PRONUNCIATION AS A VOLUNTEER ESL TUTOR: DETERMINING NEEDS AND DESIGNING SUPPORT

BY

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The demand for English instruction surpasses the availability of trained professionals and affordable programs as increasing numbers of immigrants and other international visitors to the U.S. seek out opportunities to improve their English language skills (Henrichson, 2010). To help meet this need, many community programs—often staffed entirely by volunteers—offer classes in a variety of informal settings. In most programs, however, the key qualification for volunteer tutors is simply that they are native speakers of English and are willing to share their time to help others (Henrichsen, 2010; Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003; Snow, 2006). In other words, most volunteers have no professional preparation in teaching ESL .

This ultimate aim of this study was to develop professional development resources—specifically in the area of pronunciation—designed for those who volunteer in adult ESL programs, but who have little/no professional training in ESL. Interviews were conducted with 20 volunteer tutors and 11 adult ESL students to assess their knowledge and attitudes about pronunciation teaching and learning. The interview findings were considered in conjunction with current research in pronunciation pedagogy to develop a program that would provide volunteers with a research-based foundation in pronunciation pedagogy that would ultimately help them provide more effective support for their students.

The resulting program has a flexible structure to accommodate the realities of a community program staffed by busy volunteers. The program is designed to span several months and includes resources for an introductory workshop, scripts for a series of short video tutorials about a variety of pronunciation topics, and accompanying print materials to use with students.

To those who travel far from home and find the courage to speak

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2015, I began my position as the director of a free adult ESL program in a central Illinois. I didn't have any formal ESL training at the time, but the program had a wealth of books and other resources about vocabulary and grammar and reading, and I was reasonably confident that my decades of experience as an educator in other domains would enable me to at least organize the structure of the program and help it run smoothly. (I am no longer the director of the program because I fell in love with ESL and decided to pursue a Master's in Teaching English as a Second Language [MATESL], but I still volunteer there.) The program is held four mornings a week, is staffed by over 20 volunteer tutors, and is attended each day by an average of 35 adult students—some immigrants, some spouses of graduate students—from up to 20 different countries and almost as many different native languages. Students are placed into one of four different groups of 8-12 students each, based on informally assessed English proficiency levels. Students in the lowest proficiency group come to the program speaking no English at all. Those in the highest are quite fluent and simply want conversation practice. But most are somewhere in between, hoping to gain language skills that will help them survive and thrive in their new community.

One day, during break time at the ESL program, I was talking one-on-one with Michel, an outgoing young man from a French-speaking West African country. He was telling me about his wife, a visiting scholar at the local university. I asked, "What does your wife study?" Michel replied, "My wife studies /kən ˈ**sɛr**/." I was confused, so I repeated: "She studies /kən ˈ**sɛr**/? What is /kən ˈ**sɛr**/?" Patrick said the word several more times, but I could not figure out what he was trying to say, even though I was accustomed to speaking with students with many different

accents. Finally, I asked if he could write the word. He wrote the letters: C A N C E R. "Oh!" I exclaimed. "You mean /ˈ**kæn** sər/!"

Later, I realized that I likely would have understood what Patrick was saying *if* he had produced the correct syllable stress. In other words, if Michel had said /ˈ**kən** sɛr/ with the stress on the first syllable, my brain would probably have translated that as "cancer", even with his French accent affecting the vowel sounds. I couldn't help but wonder how many times Michel was faced with situations where the listener—perhaps a store clerk, a doctor, a waiter, his child's teacher—could not understand him, even though he was working very hard to learn English and was, by and large, using the correct vocabulary. But yet I knew that during my time as the director or as a volunteer tutor at the ESL program, there was no intentional focus on pronunciation beyond occasional worksheets with minimal pairs, and well-meaning efforts of tutors whose only strategy was to say, "Try to say it like me!"

This experience with Michel stayed with me, and I started paying more attention to what tutors and students were saying about their pronunciation learning and teaching needs. Students often asked if they could have "pronunciation lessons". Many talked about their frustration and embarrassment about not being understood in settings like stores and doctor appointments, or when they had to talk on the phone. Several tutors reported being uncomfortable when they couldn't understand their students; they were not sure what to do or say. I also noted that most tutors reported being much more comfortable with helping students with grammar and vocabulary than with pronunciation.

By this time I was in the thick of my MATESL coursework and was enrolled in EIL488, *English Phonology and Morphology for TESL*. Before taking that course, I assumed that if students could produce the individual sounds of a word, others would understand them. But as I

learned from the /kən ˈ**sɛr**/ vs /ˈ**kæn** sər/ experience, as well as from Celce-Murcia, Brinton, Goodwin, & Griner (2010) and Dr. Suzanne Franks in EIL488, comprehensibility and intelligibility rely on suprasegmental features at least as much (if not more than) the stringing together of individual sounds.

Pronunciation was clearly an important issue. Students were working hard to learn English so they could participate in community life, but if they consistently had difficulty being understood when they spoke, and if their tutors (although big-hearted and willing to help) felt unprepared to support their pronunciation needs, then there was clearly a big gap to be filled. (Note that, with the exception of two of the 20 volunteer tutors in the program, none of the other tutors had any ESL training, meaning that they were likely as in the dark about working with pronunciation as I was before my MATESL days.)

I did some quick research to see if there were succinct, accessible resources about pronunciation instruction geared toward volunteers with no formal ESL training. I was initially excited to find an article by Henrichsen (2010) which described a basic ESL teacher-training program aimed at untrained volunteer tutors called *Basic Training and Resources for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages: The Least You Should Know and Where to Go to Learn More* (abbreviated BTRTESOL, pronounced "Better TESOL"). The BTRTESOL program purportedly offers instructional units in grammar, vocabulary, culture, and pronunciation, but, at the writing of this thesis, clicking any link under the "English Pronunciation" section (as well as many of the other sections) resulted in the disappointing message "Coming Soon!" Given that the article was written 8 years ago, I wasn't optimistic that pronunciation help for volunteer tutors was just around the corner.

Thus the idea for this thesis was born and work began in earnest. In a nutshell, I 1) read extensively about existing research on pronunciation instruction, particularly in the context of ESL programs staffed by volunteers; 2) interviewed volunteer tutors to look more closely at their knowledge and attitudes about pronunciation instruction; 3) interviewed students to shed light on their opinions about and experiences with pronunciation instruction, as well as hear their real-world pronunciation experiences; and 4) combined interview findings with background reading to develop professional development resources about teaching pronunciation that are targeted at volunteers with little/no professional training in ESL or pronunciation. (Note: I will use the term "*professional* development" throughout this thesis, even though the development is technically aimed at *non*-professional volunteer tutors.) The professional development takes the form of an introductory "workshop" with additional videos, activities, and materials for tutors to use at their own pace and discretion. This part of the thesis was quite daunting (there is so much to convey, and developing an extensive curriculum can take years), but I approached this within these parameters: I developed a complete outline of the workshop and accompanying scripts for video tutorials, and then developed lessons and materials for each of the main "units" that are described in the plan (See Chapter 5: Discussion). Throughout, I paid careful attention to incorporating what I learned from the interviews and from the review of research literature, and, as a result, was careful to include a variety of activities (controlled practice, communicative practice, listening/perception practice, practice with gestures and movement, practice with different vocabulary that aligns with various thematic units, etc.) The overall structure of the program is flexible to allow for more materials to be added later as they are developed.

I believe that this work fills a clear gap. The demand for English instruction will likely continue to surpass the availability of trained professionals and affordable programs, so the use

of volunteers as language tutors will remain a reality and a necessity. This project attempts to understand the pronunciation instruction needs of tutors and learners in community language programs and to provide tutors with a research-based foundation in pronunciation pedagogy that will ultimately help them provide more effective support for their students.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will summarize what the research literature says about volunteer-based ESL programs, about learner attitudes regarding the importance of pronunciation instruction, about teacher preparedness and attitudes regarding teaching pronunciation, and about pronunciation teaching in general. This literature review will also examine recommendations about what to consider when planning professional development related to pronunciation, as well as what features of pronunciation instruction are most important to focus on.

Volunteer-based ESL Programs

There is little research about the teaching of English by *volunteers*. However, a few studies shed some light on various aspects of this issue.

Throughout the country, volunteers work as ESL tutors in community programs, adult basic education programs, literacy programs, and programs in churches, libraries, and local businesses. In most programs, the key qualification of volunteer tutors is that they are native speakers of English and are willing to share their time to help others (Henrichsen, 2010; Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003; Snow, 2006). In other words, most tutors have no professional preparation in teaching ESL (e.g., Gilbertson, 2000; Henrichsen, 2010; Schlusberg & Mueller, 1995; Wu & Carter, 2000). For example, in a survey (Wu & Carter, 2000) of 78 volunteers at a community ESL program in Princeton, New Jersey, only 40% had teaching experience of any kind, and rarely in the field of ESL. Interestingly, however, 25% of volunteers had been in program for over 3 years, and almost all stayed in the program for at least a year, indicating that satisfaction is clearly high—likely because of personal satisfaction of helping others (Schlusberg & Mueller, 1995; Wu & Carter, 2000). Henrichsen (2010) also points out

that the intrinsic rewards of helping others gain a life skill (English) compels many to commit to this type of volunteer work. In addition, many volunteers with "international mindsets" find that teaching ESL is a satisfying and affordable way to meet people from all over the world.

It's important to note that the use of untrained volunteers is often viewed with some caution. For example, Harris & Silva (1993) warn that simply being a native English speaker does not equip a tutor to deal with the cultural, emotional, and academic struggles experienced by many English learners. Gilbertson (2000) studied volunteers who worked with refugees in the Midwest, and concluded that there are several reasons why volunteers with no training can do more harm than good: Volunteers often teach how *they* were taught, which was often by rote memorizing or by a grammar translation method. Another concern is that volunteers may unwittingly treat adults like children because of their low level of English skills. In addition, not all volunteers are culturally aware and may be insensitive to important norms that can affect a learner's attitude and progress.

However, while Henrichsen (2010) acknowledges that some are opposed to the idea of volunteers teaching without training and "without a license," she stresses that volunteers are extremely valuable in cash-strapped community programs, and many do a good job, particularly because many possess important teacher traits such as commitment, time, interest in others. Schlusberg & Mueller (1995) also point out that volunteers are often well equipped to provide encouragement, time, and attention that builds the confidence of learners, which, in some instances, may make them more likely to pursue more formal ESL and other education classes, often at community colleges.

How many volunteer tutors are out there? This is a difficult question to answer because organizations are usually not required to track or report those data. However, Henrichsen (2010)

summarized statistical data from 1986 and found that about 50% of 2,900 adult education programs (offered through community colleges, school districts, and adult learning centers), and nearly 100% of 1,300 local adult literacy programs (sponsored by community organizations such as churches and libraries) utilized volunteers. These numbers, of course, represent only the tip of the iceberg, as the influx of immigrants to the United States has increased since 1986. Henrichsen (2010) also reports that the 2006-2007 statistical report of ProLiteracy Worldwide (which offers ESL classes at all levels, from low beginning to advanced) indicates that this one organization used 117,283 volunteers to serve 189,600 students in over 1,200 programs across the United States (ProLiteracy Worldwide, 2007, p. 1).

Finally, Schlusberg & Mueller (1995) and Wu & Carter (2000) concluded that the use of volunteer instructors has an important impact on community ESL programs throughout the U.S., which usually survive on bare-bones budgets. Schlusberg & Mueller (1995) report that issues like budget cuts and immigration reform all impact the need for English-teaching, and Henrichsen (2010) points out that many learners are from low socio-economic backgrounds and are specifically looking for low-cost/free programs. As a result, the demand can easily surpass the supply of teachers and affordable programs. This growing demand is often met by volunteer-based programs, which play a critical role in filling the gap.

Learner Attitudes about the Importance of Pronunciation Instruction

While I was not able to find research about learners in programs staffed by volunteers, some researchers have looked at adult ESL learners in programs taught by licensed teachers. For example, Derwing & Rossiter (2002) studied 100 adult immigrants enrolled in a full-time ESL program at a local college, ranging in age from 19 to 64 years and representing 19 different

native languages. Participants were asked if their speaking difficulties were because of language problems, pronunciation problems, or both. 55% reported that pronunciation was a key contributor to their communication difficulties. Derwing (2003) also reported that all of the 100 participants—regardless of whether they considered themselves to have difficulties with pronunciation—indicated that pronunciation is an important factor in communication. In particular, they noted experiences related to pronunciation that left them feeling embarrassed, ignored, disliked, intimidated, sad, frustrated, and ridiculed.

It's no surprise, then, that pronunciation instruction is regularly requested by English learners, and many students note that pronunciation is difficult to learn on their own (Zielinski, 2012; Zielinski & Yates, 2014). Yet even though we know that intelligible pronunciation plays a key role in communication, many ESL programs have embraced only a minimal focus on pronunciation (Baker, 2014; Couper, 2003; Derwing & Rossiter, 2002).

Teacher Preparedness and Attitudes about Teaching Pronunciation

Again, in the absence of specific research about preparing *volunteers* to teach aspects of pronunciation, the following studies about professionally-trained teachers provide some valuable insights about teacher-training in general.

In light of the importance of pronunciation instruction, many researchers (e.g., Breitkreutz, Derwing, & Rossiter, 2001; Derwing, 2010; Derwing & Munro, 2005; Foote et al., 2011) have documented the importance of preparing teachers to teach pronunciation. As Foote et al. (2013) point out, helping students produce intelligible speech requires proactive (not just reactive, as in the form of recasts) approaches. Teachers need knowledge and resources to take on this recommended proactivity.

However, there is extensive research evidence that teachers with formal ESL training often feel unprepared or reluctant to work on pronunciation skills with their students because they don't have adequate training or resources (Baker, 2014; Burgess & Spencer, 2000; Couper, 2017; Derwing, 2010; Derwing & Munro, 2005; Foote, Holtby, & Derwing, 2011; Levis, 2005; Macdonald, 2002; Murphy, 2014; Schaetzel & Low, 2009; Zielinski & Yates, 2014). Specifically, many teachers report that they do not know how to describe speech processes to learners, or how to focus on issues beyond phoneme production, such as intonation, rhythm, and stress. Adding to the list, Baker (2014) found that teachers reported that pronunciation instruction was often boring.

According to Schaetzel and Low (2009) and Baker and Burri (2016), native speakers of English—while completely proficient themselves—often have very limited understanding of the *mechanics* of what they are doing naturally and automatically as they speak. In other words, they lack knowledge about the mechanics of sound production, rhythm, stress, and intonation, as well as the *teaching strategies* that will convey those concepts to their students. In addition, many ESL teachers encounter students from a variety of linguistic backgrounds and are unprepared to identify and prioritize their specific pronunciation needs.

Darcy (2018) sums up the issue nicely by referring to the "Pronunciation Teaching Paradox"—the fact that even though almost all teachers in a recent study (Darcy, Ewert, & Lidster, 2012) stated that pronunciation is a critical aspect of learning a language, most admitted to feeling unprepared to teach it, often avoiding it.

Again, the studies mentioned above were conducted with certified teachers who had formal ESL training. It's certainly not a stretch to assume that volunteers feel even less confident and less prepared to help students with pronunciation.

Pronunciation Teaching in General

Derwing & Munro (2009) summarize some of the history of pronunciation instruction as follows: After Audiolingualism, the teaching of pronunciation fell out of favor, especially as the idea of nativelike production was no longer considered a realistic goal for most learners. Also, many believed that pronunciation instruction simply wasn't effective at improving production. Then, with the advent of Communicative Language Teaching, it was assumed the learners would just "pick up" pronunciation through authentic input. However, recent studies (e.g., Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Derwing & Rossiter, 2002; Foote et al., 2013; Lee, Jang, & Plonsky, 2015) have argued that not giving enough attention to pronunciation instruction is detrimental to learners because good pronunciation is such vital component of communication. (The research findings also noted that this marginalization of pronunciation instruction was likely responsible for the lack of teacher preparation in the area of pronunciation, as described in the previous section.)

Current research, however, points strongly to the effectiveness of pronunciation instruction. For example, studies by Derwing and Munro (2009), Flege and Liu (2001), Trofimovich and Baker (2006), Lee et al. (2015), and Thomson & Derwing (2015) all show that, while adult L2 learners almost always have a noticeable non-native accent, continued pronunciation practice over time can lead to more nativelike production. Also, Couper (2006) conducted a classroom-based study of New Zealand immigrants and found that focused instruction can lead to changes in pronunciation, even when fossilization was assumed. This finding was also reported by Derwing et al. (2014). Moreover, many studies report that students show improvement in pronunciation, even after short 2-week periods of instruction (Derwing,

Munro, & Wiebe, 1998; Gordon & Darcy, 2016; Lee et al., 2015; Thomson & Derwing, 2015; Trofimovich, Lightbown, Halter, & Song, 2009).

In addition to the recent rebirth of pronunciation as a topic worthy of instruction, the field has also undergone a shift in emphasis—or at least an *addition* in emphasis. Now, along with focusing on segmentals (the individual sounds of a language), current recommendations stress the importance of instruction about suprasegmental features, such as intonation, rhythm, and connected speech—all of which greatly affect intelligibility (Anderson-Hsieh, 1990; Celce-Murcia, Brinton, Goodwin, & Griner, 2010; Foote et al., 2013).

Recent notions about pronunciation also tend to center primarily on the issues of intelligibility and comprehensibility. There is no longer emphasis on students sounding like native speakers. While it's true that there is a correlation between the strength of a foreign accent and a speaker's comprehensibility and intelligibility, a strong foreign accent does not *necessarily* result in low comprehensibility or intelligibility (Munro & Derwing, 1995, 2001).

Beyond the goal of effective, intelligible communication, several studies indicate that students' pronunciation skills play a huge role in their overall language learning process (Derwing et al., 2014; Thomson & Derwing, 2015). For example, pronunciation development has been linked to orthographical development (Wang, Park, & Lee, 2006), to self-confidence and feelings of belonging (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010; Tang, Zhang, Li, & Zhao, 2013), and to students' willingness to communicate (Derwing et al., 2014).

Some may argue that the teaching of pronunciation is tricky territory because of the possibility of implying that the learner's identity—often shown through his/her accent—is being negatively viewed. However, Derwing & Munro (2009) contend that "identity and intelligibility are both obviously important, but when it comes to sacrificing intelligibility FOR identity, there

is no reason to believe that many learners will make that choice. Surely, if one is intelligible and comprehensible, one's expression of identity will come through more clearly (p. 485)."

Structure and Content of Staff Development for Pronunciation Instruction

Recommendations about Program Design

Many researchers offer suggestions about important issues to consider when designing staff development programs and materials. In this section, I categorize the suggestions under statements that I can refer to when designing the staff development components of this thesis project.

Find out what teachers and students know and need. A key component of designing effective staff development programming is a needs assessment that includes both instructors and learners. Assessment of staff development needs should be based, in large part, on the thoughts and perceptions of teachers and volunteer instructors (Orlich, 1989).

Design staff development programs and materials that fit the actual knowledge, experience, and time constraints of a volunteer teaching staff. Zimmerman (2018) notes that published materials often overestimate what teachers know, meaning that it can be quite difficult for an inexperienced teacher with very little preparation time to internalize the key points and goals of a pronunciation lesson. This point is also highlighted by a statement by Masuhara (2011), who taught English for more than 30 years before going on to a career as a materials developer. Even with his wealth of experience, when asked what he wanted from resource books and materials, his answer was, "I want course books that are so engaging, inspiring, flexible and effective that I can teach without much extra work" (p. 236). This is a high bar, of course, but

it's an important point to remember in the context of developing materials for inexperienced volunteer teachers with busy lives.

Incorporate the findings from needs assessments *and* current research about pronunciation teaching and learning. Jenkins (2002) argues against excessive reliance on intuition when creating pronunciation syllabi, and stresses the need to consider empirical evidence.

Offer video examples to clarify concepts and activities. Sonsaat (2018) suggests that a combination of printed and online materials can be an effective way to train teachers who are new to the field of pronunciation. Zimmerman (2018) adds that effective staff development programs offer suggestions for ways to adapt activities to individual student's needs, as well as clear instructions and examples that enable teachers to lead classroom activities with confidence.

Include activities for all proficiency levels. Darcy et al., (2012) and Zielinski and Yates (2014) found that pronunciation instruction can be effective for learners at all levels, beginning at the early stages of language learning and continuing throughout the learning trajectory.

Even a little bit of training helps. Echelberger, McCurdy, and Parrish (2018) conducted a study that lasted just 5 weeks, and teachers showed an increased ability to describe pronunciation issues, and integrate pronunciation instruction in their classes.

Recommendations about the Content of Pronunciation Instruction

In the introduction to this thesis, I referred to my pronunciation coursework, EIL488, a semester-long, 4-credit-hour course. I worked hard and learned a great deal, but still felt like I was scratching the surface of the world of English pronunciation. So how does one begin to decide what to focus on during staff development for inexperienced volunteers in a very compact

time frame? Derwing & Munro (2009) point out that it's easy for everything to feel salient because students—especially beginners—have so many gaps. Yet they urge teachers to be mindful that, without careful thought and planning, it's possible to waste time on content that will not actually help the speaker become more intelligible or better able to communicate.

Syllabus construction and staff development planning are particularly tricky because there is no "gold standard", no "one size fits all". Phonological skill doesn't always align with language proficiency levels within a program. Students' needs are affected by a variety of issues, including their L1 background and how many opportunities they have to hear and speak English outside of class (Darcy, 2018).

One way to approach the "what to focus on" dilemma is to begin by recognizing that current views about pronunciation emphasize that *intelligibility* matters most. For example, recommendations by Foote, Holtby, & Derwing (2011) include the importance of integrating pronunciation instruction in regular classes, making intelligibility the primary goal, and focusing the most time on pronunciation issues that have the most effect on intelligibility.

While there are still many educators (and students) who hang on to the notion that attainment of nativelike pronunciation should be the primary aim (Timmis, 2002), the goal of instruction should rather be to enhance the spoken language of speakers whose pronunciation difficulties interfere with their intelligibility and *comprehensibility*. As mentioned earlier, research has demonstrated that strongly accented speech does not necessarily interfere with comprehensibility (Munro & Derwing, 1995)**.** (A note here about the terms *intelligibility* and *comprehensibility*: While related and often used interchangeably when discussing pronunciation features, Derwing and Munro (2005) distinguish these two terms in the following way: *Intelligibility* refers to the extent to which a listener understands what is being said, while

comprehensibility refers to the listener's perception of how difficult it is to understand what is being said.)

This section of the literature review will summarize features of pronunciation instruction that merit inclusion in a staff development program for volunteers based on the feature's *high value* in promoting intelligibility. A high-value feature refers to feature that, if changed (even if everything else remains the same), is likely to make listeners rate the speech as more intelligible (Gilbert, 2001).

Focus on the "macroscopic". Derwing and Munro (2005) use the term "macroscopic things" to emphasize that the most important features of intelligibility are big-picture aspects like volume, general speaking and presentation habits, stress, rhythm, and segmentals *that have a high functional load* (see more about functional load below.)

Consider the pronunciation priorities suggested by the experts. Several researchers offer suggestions for how to prioritize pronunciation features. For example, Levis and Grant (2003) list 3 principles to consider when planning a pronunciation curriculum: Principle 1: Aim for a primary though not exclusive focus on suprasegmentals; Principle 2: Maintain a central focus on speaking; Principle 3: Pronunciation instruction should fit the constraints of the speaking task, meaning that students should engage in both planned and unplanned speaking tasks.

Goodwin (2014) suggests the following as key aspects that should be included in pronunciation teaching: 1) word stress, number of syllables; 2) natural intonation (thought groups) and natural breaks; 3) connected speech features, linking; 4) syllable timing and vowel reduction; 5) pausing and fluency; 6) final and "important" consonants; 7) vowel duration.

Brinton (2014) considers what teachers of pronunciation need to know and offers a framework that divides pronunciation knowledge into 3 parts: 1) conceptual knowledge (basic philosophy of communication), 2) descriptive knowledge (basic facts of pronunciation), and 3) procedural knowledge (basic skills needed to teach pronunciation).

Finally, Gilbert (2001) – who offers guidelines with an emphasis on *beginners* – recommends a concentration on the following 6 features: 1) decoding print (the alphabet, rules for decoding print to sound, long vowels/short vowels); 2) grammar sounds (ending sounds); 3) linking; 4) rhythm (number of syllables); 5) rhythm (lengthening for stress, shortening for destress); and 6) emphasis (most important word).

Emphasize the importance of including some communicative activities. In my experience, volunteer teachers without formal ESL training are likely to be more comfortable leading controlled activities with their students, rather than activities that are more open-ended. And research certainly shows that controlled techniques can improve learner intelligibility and phonological skills (e.g., Baker, 2014; Couper, 2003; Derwing et al., 1998). However, research has also shown that the use of communicative activities can have a greater impact on helping students produce targeted pronunciation features more automatically (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Saito & Lyster, 2012).

Consider functional load when choosing which segmental errors to focus on. Not all segmental errors are created equal. Some are more likely to create issues with intelligibility than others. Instruction should focus on phonemes with a high functional load, based on the goal of intelligibility (Brown, 1991; Derwing & Munro, 2005; Kang & Moran, 2014). The term *functional load* refers to the importance of a feature – like a specific sound, for example – in making critical distinctions in a language, particularly as those distinctions relate to

intelligibility. For example, substituting /t/ for /θ/ (saying *ting* instead of *thing*) has less impact on intelligibility than substituting /b/ for /p/ (saying *bat* instead of *pat*). As a result, /θ/ has less functional load than /b/ or /p/.

It's interesting to note that students and teachers are not necessarily aware of which sound errors are most likely to interfere with communication. For example, many studies have shown that students and teachers overwhelmingly indicate that the /θ/ sound (the sound of the "th" in *thanks*) is the most likely sound to impact intelligibility (Derwing, 2010; Derwing & Rossiter, 2002; Levis & Cortes, 2008; Munro & Derwing, 2006). However, Derwing (2010) points out that many speakers are completely fluent and intelligible even though they can't produce the /θ/ sound. For example, substituting /f/ for /θ/ (saying *fanks* instead of *thanks*) has minimal impact on comprehensibility. Researchers contend that, in contrast, /i/ vs /ɪ/ (*sheep* vs *ship*) and /ɛ/ vs /ɪ/ (*pen* vs *pin*) distinguish large numbers of minimal pairs. In other words, the incorrect productions of /ɪ/ will have more serious implications for speakers than the incorrect production of /θ/ (Levis & Cortes, 2008; Munro & Derwing, 2006).

In order to make decisions about which sounds contribute most to intelligibility, a functional load table by Kang & Moran (2014) and a similar table by Brown (1991) would be useful tools in determining which sounds to focus on.

Emphasize the importance of instruction about suprasegmental aspects of pronunciation. The previous section on *functional load* addressed some of the issues of "what to teach" in terms of segmentals, but what about suprasegmentals? How important is it to teach volunteers about pronunciation components like stress, intonation, and rhythm? Research indicates that it is very important. McNerney and Mendelsohn (1992) state that focusing on suprasegmentals has the greatest impact on intelligibility and comprehensibility, and, as a result,

is more rewarding for students. And according to Foote et al. (2013), teachers should receive training in the important connection between suprasegmentals and intelligibility.

In fact, some studies found that suprasegmental instruction has almost twice the impact on intelligibility compared to segmental instruction (Gordon & Darcy, 2016; Lee, Jang, & Plonsky, 2015). And Derwing (2003) notes that prosodic features are better to focus on for diverse groups of students because, unlike work with segmentals, prosody applies to all learners at all levels.

Derwing & Rossiter (2003) sum up the importance of suprasegmentals with the following statement: "We do not advocate eliminating segment-based instruction altogether, but, if the goal of pronunciation teaching is to help students become more understandable, then this study suggests that it should include a stronger emphasis on prosody" (p. 14).

Zielinski (2008) noted that segmentals and syllable stress are intertwined and should be taught as such to maximize intelligibility. According to Zielinski (2008), instruction should emphasize the accuracy of segmentals in stressed (or *strong*) syllables, as that distinction in sound provides information that native listeners depend on. (The encounter with Michel that I described in the introduction certainly attests to the importance of correct syllable stress!)

Several key strategies that follow from research about teaching suprasegmentals emphasize a focus on primary stress—both word (syllable) stress and phrasal stress—including perception exercises where students compare speech samples with correct, incorrect, and missing primary stress; as well as demonstrations and exercises that teach students to *de*stress old information (Hahn, 2004b; Levis & Grant, 2003).

Jenkins (2002) also includes primary stress as a crucial phonological feature of intelligibility. Pennington and Ellis (2000) found explicit *instruction* in primary stress was

significantly linked to improved primary stress *production*. In addition, Derwing et al. (1998) found that explicit suprasegmental instruction (including primary stress) has been linked to significant improvements in comprehension and fluency.

Also related to primary stress, Levis (2001) notes that it's very difficult for learners to think about rules for the correct placement of primary phrase stress (referred to as *focus* stress by the author) while in a natural conversation. He proposes a different way to consider teaching focus stress, which involves emphasizing just a few contexts that have high value in terms of improving intelligibility: focus stress related to answers to questions, focus stress related to the correction of misinformation, and focus stress related to repeated questions.

Finally, anyone who has worked with English learners knows that students often complain that native English speakers "talk too fast". Gilbert (2008) points out that this is another reason why suprasegmental features are important to focus on. Learners need practice hearing the rhythm, reductions, linking, and stress of English so they can make sense of native speaker speech.

Include listening discrimination activities. Listening discrimination activities play an important role in increasing and maintaining successful phonological production (Baker, 2014; Bradlow, Akahane-Yamada, Pisoni, & Tohkura, 1999; Gilbert, 1995; Gilbert, 1993; Murphy, 1991; Trofimovich et al., 2009). For example, Bradlow, Pisoni, Akahane-Yamada, and Tohkura (1997) found that Japanese speakers who were trained to *perceive* the /r/ - /l/ distinction improved their production, even though they didn't receive production training. In addition, research shows that students benefit from the challenge of discriminating the sounds made by a variety of speakers (Lewis & Deterding, 2018), which means that there is a hidden benefit in the many-tutors-per-week scenario that is common in many community ESL programs.

Demonstrate techniques involving physical movement and/or gestures. Techniques that incorporate physical movement and/or gestures are valuable in pronunciation work (Acton, 2001; Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Graham, 1986). These techniques involve activities like clapping or stretching a rubber band (Baker, 2014; Gilbert, 2008; Murphy, 2004) and mirroring a teacher's body movements and facial expressions (Acton, 1984; Haught & Mccafferty, 2008; Smotrova, 2017). Smotrova (2017) specifically looked at the use of gesture for suprasegmental features like rhythm and word stress. The study examined video of classes for English beginners and results showed that teachers used "reiterative gestures" (*catchments*) to help students notice and reproduce correct syllabification, word stress, and rhythm. For example, syllabification was sometimes enhanced by paying attention to chin movements (hand under chin to feel it move with each exaggerated vowel sound), by tapping one hand with a finger on the other hand, and by clapping. Word stress was sometimes shown by lifting a hand or arm, by raising the whole body upwards to denote the raise in pitch, or by having students tilt their heads from side to side to emphasize the rhythm. Gesture research points to a natural link between the sounds we make and the body movements we produce while speaking (Loehr, 2007; Smotrova, 2017). This is related to the stress-timed nature of English where the number of stresses predicts the length and rhythm of an utterance, rather than the number of syllables (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010).

Clarify the importance of explicit feedback. I know from experience that it's often difficult to know how and how often to correct students' pronunciation. It's also common for teachers to worry about discouraging their students by drawing attention to their errors. However, research has shown that explicit corrective feedback results in improvement in segmental features, word stress, and rhythm/intonation (Anderson-Hsieh, Johnson, & Koehler, 1992; Derwing & Munro, 1997; Foote et al., 2011; Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2013; Munro &

Derwing, 1995). In addition, research shows that students generally welcome feedback and are usually far less anxious about receiving it than teachers are about providing it (Ellis, 2009; Roothooft & Breeze, 2016; Zhang & Rahimi, 2014).

Implicit feedback or "listening only" interventions don't give students enough information to make progress toward "closing the gap" between the target pronunciation and their own pronunciation (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Dlaska & Krekeler, 2013). Instead, explicit corrective feedback when combined with thoughtful instruction is a much more powerful tool (Dlaska & Krekeler, 2013; Kissling, 2013; Saito & Lyster, 2012). For example, giving comments like "excellent" and "good job" may have little to no benefit to students (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), and, in some cases, may actually reduce the chance that further learning will occur (Wong & Waring, 2009). A more effective method is to provide more detailed positive feedback that describes exactly what the student did well (Baker & Burri, 2016; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). For example, a teacher might say, "Great pronunciation of that /r/ sound!" Relatedly, when students make errors, recasts and corrections are most effective when they are explicit; in other words, when the student is clear about what is being corrected (Gordon & Darcy, 2016; Lyster, 2004; Saito & Lyster, 2012). For example, a teacher might say, "You made a mistake with that word/sound. You said [mispronounced word/sound] and it should be [word/sound pronounced correctly].Try this…"

Explicit feedback is also important because it helps the learner become more self-aware of their pronunciation difficulties, enabling them to self-monitor and self-correct (Derwing et al., 1998; Gordon & Darcy, 2016; Kennedy & Trofimovich, 2010).

Provide suggestions for ways that students can practice English outside of class. To gain the most benefit from classroom instruction, teachers should encourage students to practice

English outside the classroom (Schaetzel & Low, 2009; Shively, 2008). For example, Yoshida (2018) suggests useful online options for practicing pronunciation, such as using videos from English Central (https://www.englishcentral.com) and Voicetube (https:// www.voicetube.com) to shadow and imitate, and referring to YouGlish (http:// youglish.com/) as a YouTube video search app that provides examples of the pronunciation of chosen words or phrases in natural contexts.

Don't ignore the teaching of compensation strategies. In a study by Derwing and Rossiter (2002), students identified segmental issues as most problematic for them; however, when asked about what they do if their speech is not understood, they did not mention that they try to adjust their segmental production. Instead, they mentioned strategies like paraphrasing, spelling or writing a word, and volume adjustment. In other words, English learners seem to naturally lean towards compensation strategies. Jenkins (2002) also notes the importance of teaching compensation skills in order to give students valuable practice in adjusting their speech based on cues from the listener. Some compensation strategies that can be effective communication tools include speaking more slowly, paraphrasing, and choosing synonyms that are more easily understood (Lewis & Deterding, 2018; Walker, 2010). In addition, students can benefit from explicit instruction about other strategies such as giving examples of a problematic word, collocating a word within a familiar context, acting out a word or phrase, and contrasting a word with its opposite (Smith, Meyers, & Burkhalter, 2007).

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

The method portion of this thesis describes the interview process with both volunteer tutors and adult ESL students. The purpose of the interviews was to provide a systematic look at volunteer tutors' knowledge and attitudes about pronunciation instruction, as well as students' experiences and attitudes about how pronunciation issues affect their lives. The findings would serve as a needs analysis that, in conjunction with other existing research about pronunciation pedagogy, would inform the structure and content of professional development resources and materials for volunteer tutors.

This study was approved by the Office of Protections of Research Subjects at the University of Illinois. The IRB approval letter can be found in Appendix A.

Data Collection Method

The Setting

All interviews were conducted with volunteer tutors or students at a free community ESL program housed in a local church in a small urban university community in the Midwest. The program runs Monday through Thursday mornings, year-round. While housed in a church, the program is open to students and tutors of any (or no) faith background. I chose this site because the ESL program is the largest volunteer-based community program in the city, with one paid director and over 20 volunteer tutors, and it serves about 30–40 students each day. Thus, I hoped that the site could potentially provide a substantial number of participants.

A note about my connection with the setting. I had served as the director of the ESL program about a year before I began data collection, so I knew many of the tutors and some of the students. I viewed this familiarity as a bonus to my thesis project. I was a known entity;

tutors and students trusted me and were happy to be interviewed. I was completely transparent about the purpose of the interviews: I explained that I was working on a project that would result in more resources and materials that could be used as part of the ESL program (and other ESL programs as well.) I emphasized that their honest responses to my questions would help me design the best possible resources with their knowledge, needs, questions, and challenges in mind. Of course, transparency and familiarity can also have potential negative effects on data collection. In this study, all the participants knew that I was designing resources for pronunciation instruction, so they would likely assume that pronunciation teaching was near and dear to my heart. Would they be hesitant or uncomfortable to discuss their views on the importance of pronunciation instruction if they believed it differed from mine? Possibly. But common sense would suggest that pronunciation is not a topic fraught with controversy or secrecy (in other words, it's reasonable to assume that most participants would feel completely at ease about responding honestly), so I think it's fair to say that the negative impacts of my connection to the program were very small or nonexistent.

Recruiting Participants

Volunteer Tutors. Volunteer tutors were recruited via email to participate in an interview. The email explained the purpose of the interview and that the time commitment would be about 30 minutes. Participants were assured that they would not be identified in my thesis, in any subsequent publications, or in any of the materials developed in association with the project. Additional emails were used to schedule a face-to-face interview with anyone who expressed interest. Each participant signed a consent form, and all interviews were recorded. Participants understood that after I had transcribed the recording, the recording would be deleted. Every tutor

who volunteered at the ESL Program was offered an opportunity to participate, and everyone who expressed interest was interviewed. In the end, I interviewed 20 volunteer tutors.

Students. I decided to only interview students from the top two proficiency levels offered at the ESL Program. (Note: The ESL Program assigns students to leveled groups based on very informal methods – usually by means of a quick interview with the director of the program. However, to provide a sense of what is meant by "top two proficiency levels" of this particular program, the students would likely fall somewhere in the Intermediate–Low to Intermediate–High range according to the 2012 ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines.) The main rational for recruiting students from these two groups was to avoid needing an interpreter to conduct the interviews. While this subset of students might have different needs and views compared to students at lower proficiency levels–which may be considered a limiting factor in this study–I felt that the types of information I was most interested in (namely, students' experiences in the community regarding pronunciation struggles) would be adequately addressed by the students in the higher proficiency levels because they were more likely to venture out into the community than the less proficient students. Another factor that informed the recruiting method was my concern that the students understood exactly why I wanted to interview them; I did not want to create any stress because of a misunderstanding that perhaps I was evaluating their pronunciation. For this reason, I recruited student participants by talking to the all the students from the top two proficiency levels while they were in their classrooms, where I could be assured that if anyone had questions, there would be someone else in the group who spoke his/her native language and could help me clarify. After I explained what the project was about and why I wanted to interview them, I asked students to write their names on a sign-up sheet if they were interested in talking to me. The sign-up sheet was available in a different, empty classroom *after*

class so that no one would feel coerced to sign up (or not sign up) because their classmates were (or were not) signing up. I explained that I would interview anyone who was interested in talking with me. In the end, I interviewed 11 students. Students were offered no incentives (other than my gratitude) for participating.

Interviews

Interview format. Interviews with volunteer tutors were conducted either in an empty classroom at the site of the ESL Program or at a convenient location of the participant's choice, such as at a coffee shop or in their home. All the student interviews were conducted on site at the ESL Program, in an empty classroom. I took hand-written notes during each interview, and each interview was also recorded as a back-up to my notes. All interviews were conducted individually and lasted from 20–40 minutes, depending on how much the participant had to say. All tutor participants were asked the same set of *Interview Questions for Tutors*. All student participants were asked the same set of *Interview Questions for Students*.

Interview questions. The questions used in the tutor and student interviews were based on a framework developed by McGregor and Reed (2018) which outlines stages to consider when integrating pronunciation instruction into a curriculum. The interview questions were designed to get at the key points of Stages 1 and 2, which are related to needs assessment. The first stage looks at institutional factors, which include constraints like time, scheduling, and available resources, as well as the strengths and weaknesses in teacher/tutor knowledge about pronunciation and pronunciation instruction. The second stage looks at student background knowledge and beliefs about pronunciation, and the challenges they face related to pronunciation.

The *Interview Questions for Tutors* can be found in Appendix B.

The *Interview Questions for Students* can be found in Appendix C.

Data Analysis Method

After each interview, I used the recording to complete my notes, giving each participant a pseudonym. When transcribing responses to demographic questions, I noted only key words or main ideas. For all other questions, I transcribed each word.

Analyzing Tutor Interview Data

I looked at the responses to the demographic information, and divided the tutors into 3 groups: 1) tutors with some formal ESL or speech background, 2) tutors with formal teaching experience (but not ESL teaching), and 3) tutors with no formal teaching experience at all. Then, within each of the 3 groups, I divided the tutors into 2 subgroups: those who had volunteered at the ESL Program for less than 1 year, and those who had volunteered at the ESL Program for 1 or more years.

I then went question by question and looked for common themes and categories of responses. For example, for the question "Describe the pronunciation problems that your students have", some tutors said "the /th/ sound", others said, "they can't say /r/", and still others said, "vowels are hard". I grouped these responses under the category, "Segmental issues", while still keeping the detailed data spelled out under each category. I also noted whether any recurring responses were clumped under any particular demographic category. The spreadsheet used to organize and analyze the tutor interview data can be found in Appendix D.

Analyzing Student Interview Data

I looked at responses to the demographic questions and realized that all students had started learning English in elementary or middle school, although pronunciation was not a main

feature of their instruction. And because all of the students are currently in a similar proficiency group in the ESL program, the key question of interest was Question 4 about whether they had taken any pronunciation courses since they've been in the U.S. Based on their responses to Question 4, I divided students into two groups: those who had taken a pronunciation class, and those who had not.

I went question by question and tallied the various answers given. As with the tutor interviews, I grouped some answers into categories where appropriate. For example, when asked to describe experiences where they've encountered problems related to pronunciation issues, one student talked about feeling embarrassed, another used the words, "I became smaller and smaller", and another said, "I felt like everyone was looking at me, and I was sad." Each of those responses was grouped under the category "Felt embarrassed or sad". The spreadsheet used to organize and analyze the tutor interview data can be found in Appendix E.

For the student data, I included some de-identified quotes from the students that could possibly be used in a tutor development workshop as inspiration for why it's important to support students' pronunciation needs.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS

Summary of Interviews with Volunteer Tutors

The following is a summary of findings from the interviews with the volunteer tutors. This section begins with a summary of demographic information, then summarizes the most common responses for the remaining questions. More detailed information about the tutors' responses (including less common responses) to interview questions can be found in Appendix F.

Demographics

Questions 1–4. The first 4 questions gathered demographic data about length of time as an ESL tutor, previous ESL experience, previous non-ESL teaching experience, and proficiency speaking languages besides English. Responses indicated that of the 20 volunteer tutors interviewed for this study, 16 had been tutoring for more than a year, with 3 years as the average. Two tutors had backgrounds in ESL and/or speech pathology. Ten tutors had non-ESL teaching experience and are currently retired from those teaching positions, and 8 have no formal teaching experience of any kind. None of the tutors reported being able to speak a language other than English, although 3 reported that they could have a very simple conversation in Spanish. (Note: While Appendix H does not explicitly show these details, with the exception of a few responses by tutors who had a formal ESL/Speech background, the analysis of the data did not point to any interesting connection between a tutor's responses and whether or not that tutor was a teacher in his/her professional life or how long that tutor had volunteered in ESL.)

Knowledge and Attitudes about Pronunciation Instruction

Question 5. Segmental issues were the most common pronunciation issues that tutors noticed in their students. Eighteen of the 20 tutors (90%) mentioned at least one segmental issue. Of that 90%, the "th" sound was mentioned most often (66%), followed by /r/ and /l/

(50%). Regarding suprasegmental issues, only 3 tutors (15%) noticed issues with stress or intonation.

Question 6. Fifteen of the 20 tutors (75%) reported that it was more difficult to understand some students than others. At least 10 tutors reported that speakers of Korean, Chinese, and/or Japanese were more difficult to understand.

Questions 7 and 8. When asked if they or other students were ever unable to understand others in the class, 20 (100%) of the tutors responded that both they and their students were sometimes unable to understand others. When asked how those situations played out, 18 tutors (90%) reported that they ask the student to repeat, 18 tutors (90%) also reported that students with the same L1 often just jump in and interpret, and, if no one offers aid, 10 tutors (50%) mentioned that they (the tutor) ask if someone else in the class can help.

Questions 9 and 10. Eighteen of the 20 tutors (90%) said they thought that teaching English pronunciation in ESL class was "important" or "very important", and 19 tutors (95%) reported that they did not feel equipped to help their students with pronunciation concerns. (The one tutor that reported feeling equipped was a speech pathologist before retirement.)

Question 11. When asked what makes someone's speech "understandable", 15 of the 20 tutors (75%) reported that segmental issues ("making all the sounds right") was the most important factor. Only 5 tutors (25%) mentioned suprasegmental issues, and of those 5 tutors, one had formal ESL training, and the other 4 had been tutoring in the ESL program for more than 3 years. Other responses (25% of tutors) included rate, volume, and "knowing the context".

Question 12. When asked about what strategies they currently use to help their students with pronunciation, 18 tutors (90%) said that their primary strategy was to model the word/sound

and have the students repeat. Others (45%) reported that they sometimes write the word on the board, or say, "Watch my mouth."

Question 13. When asked "What would you like to learn about helping students with their pronunciation?", 16 tutors (80%) reported that they would like to learn strategies for teaching specific sounds, and would also like to learn a variety of pronunciation practice activities that they could incorporate in their tutoring sessions. Additionally, 8 tutors (40%) specifically requested information about which sounds are particularly difficult for various L1s that they encounter in their classes. Also, both of the tutors with an ESL background mentioned that tutors would benefit from learning how to teach compensation strategies to their students.

Suggestions for a preferred format to learn about teaching pronunciation

Question 14. When asked about a preferred format or structure for "tutor learning", 17 tutors (85%) emphasized that the training should not be too time-consuming, and that the information should be presented in a "short and digestible" way. Sixteen tutors (80%) mentioned that the training should be very practical and should provide the tutors with activities that they can immediately use with their students. In addition, 14 tutors (70%) specifically mentioned that they would like to *see* examples of activities/techniques, either via video or by watching someone demonstrate.

Summary of Interviews with Students

The following is a summary of findings from the interviews with students. This section begins with a summary of demographic information, then summarizes the most common responses of the remaining questions. More detailed information about the students' responses (including less common responses) to interview questions can be found in Appendix G.

Demographics

Questions 1–4. The first 4 questions gathered demographic data such as country of origin, native language(s), length of time in the U.S., age at beginning of English instruction, and whether they had taken courses that focused on English pronunciation. Eleven students were interviewed, representing 9 different home countries and 11 different native languages. All the students began their English instruction in either middle school or high school, and all reported that their classes met 2-3 times a week and focused on grammar and reading (not speaking).

Attitudes and Experiences Related to Pronunciation

Question 5. Students reported that they wanted to improve their pronunciation in order to be understood during everyday activities in the community (73%), to avoid embarrassment and have more confidence when speaking (73%), and to facilitate making friends (55%).

The following quote is representative of the sentiments expressed by many of the students:

"I think the most important thing now is pronunciation because most of our level student can understand grammar and we know what people are saying, but sometimes if I speak out, some people - especially native speakers - can't understand me. I think most of the tutors [at ESL] are good at understanding international students, so they can guess what I am saying. They are so patient and nice and they don't correct me, and so I am happy and I think "oh my English is much better now!" But then when I talk outside of ESL class, I realize 'Oh no, I am not good! They do not understand me!' I feel sad about this and am embarrassed to conversate with people." –Hyun (South Korea)

Question 6. When asked which sounds/words were most difficult, 91% (10) of the students reported difficulty with "the *th* sound". The phonemes /r/ and /l/ were mentioned by

66% (6) of the students. Of the 4 students (36%) who reported having difficulty with suprasegmental issues, all 4 had taken a class offered by a local school district that focused solely on pronunciation.

Question 7. When asked about self-study resources for pronunciation, 73% (8) students reported using the audio function on Google Translate. Some also reported using Voice of America (27%), and various YouTube channels (27%).

Question 8. When students spoke about problems they've encountered that they attribute to pronunciation, 82% (9) reported problems related to living in a community, such as ordering in a restaurant, dealing with health care issues, obtaining a driver's license, registering for classes, and shopping; 45% (5) reported dreading or avoiding talking on the phone; and 27% (3) reported feelings of embarrassment and shame when they are not understood.

The following quote is representative of the sentiments expressed by the students who talked about feeling embarrassment and shame:

"Sometimes when I'm talking to someone they "freeze" and I know they don't understand me, and it makes me very nervous and uncomfortable and I feel I am getting smaller and smaller and my voice is going away. And then I very hesitate to speak to native speakers because I don't want to feel shocked like this." -Aki (Japan)

Question 9. When outside of their ESL classroom, students reported having difficulty understanding English speakers when the speaker talks too fast (100%), uses unfamiliar phrasal verbs or idioms (45%), or has an unfamiliar accent (45%).

The following quote is representative of how many students described their difficulties understanding others:

"I thought I had good basic English when I came to the U.S., but for the first 3 months I was here, I didn't understand anything. I can understand better now because I know Americans say words like gonna and wanna, but at the beginning I did not understand at all. And that made me very afraid to speak." -Aysel (Turkey)

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In this section, I will discuss the process of combining the insights gained from the interviews with recommendations from pronunciation research to design resources and materials that will help volunteer tutors incorporate effective pronunciation instruction as part of their work with ESL students.

To accomplish this, I present below a broad plan for professional development and pronunciation instruction resources designed for volunteer tutors. Under each section of the plan, I reference aspects of the interview findings and/or sections of the literature review as the rationale for how and why those findings informed the plan.

Note that the actual professional development workshop and related materials that will be presented to tutors (See Apprendix H) are designed with a lay audience in mind and, while undergirded by research, do *not* include the research terminology that is summarized in the Rationale sections below.

Plan for Professional Development and Pronunciation Instruction Resources Designed for Volunteer Tutors

Overall Format and Design of Activities and Materials

First I describe the overall format of the professional development, and then the considerations that informed the design of activities.

Overall Format. The format of the professional development is designed to span a semester (about 4 months). Part One consists of an Introductory Workshop of approximately 90 minutes. This workshop is designed to be presented in a face-to-face format, but it could also be

delivered asynchronously online using video. The purpose of the Introductory Workshop is to familiarize tutors with foundational pronunciation concepts and to explain how the rest of the professional development will unfold.

After the workshop, tutors will have access to Part Two, How to Help Your Students with Pronunciation. Part Two includes brief (approximately 5 minute) tutorials about 6 broad pronunciation topics. (This thesis provides the scripts for the videos. See Appendix H. The actual production of the videos will take place at a later date.) The purpose of the videos is to provide important foundational information about each topic, and to demonstrate some of the activities that tutors can use with their students. Over the course of the semester, tutors can work through the tutorials and try out the activities with their students at their own pace.

Ideally, at the end of the semester, tutors would come together again for Part Three: Reconvene, Review, and Share. Part Three is a face-to-face meeting to review key concepts, share their successes and challenge, ask questions, and learn from each other. (Alternatively, Part Three could be redesigned as an online forum if face-to-face meetings aren't possible.)

Rationale based on interview findings. Tutors expressed that they wanted opportunities to learn about teaching pronunciation that were not overly time-consuming and that presented information in short, digestible chunks that would accommodate their busy lives. Tutors also emphasized that they wanted clearly explained activities that they can immediately use with their classes.

Rationale based on research presented in literature review. The idea of designing bite-sized chunks that tutors can immediately put to use with their students aligns with current research that even short courses in pronunciation teaching can be effective (Echelberger et al., 2018). Also, providing materials that can be adapted to a range of proficiency levels aligns with

suggestions by Darcy et al., (2012) and Zielinski and Yates (2014) that pronunciation instruction should span all stages of language learning.

Considerations that Informed the Design of Activities and Materials. The activities and materials presented in Appendix H are intentionally designed to address a variety of important components in the teaching of pronunciation. For example, materials include controlled and guided practice, but many also suggest ways to make activities more communicative. Listening and perception activities are also included, as well as opportunities to incorporate movement and gesture to teach and reinforce pronunciation features.

Most activities are designed to take just 10–15 minutes of classroom time to increase the likelihood that tutors will use the materials on a regular basis. Also, each topic has a checklist of available materials to facilitate record-keeping of "who's done what".

Rationale based on interview findings. Tutors expressed feeling ill-prepared to teach students about pronunciation. Most tutors reported using just a few common strategies, such as modeling and having students repeat, or saying, "Watch my mouth". In terms of materials, tutors currently have access to handouts about minimal pairs, but little else. Tutors will benefit from having a wide assortment of pronunciation practice activities that they can incorporate on a regular basis in their classrooms.

All students expressed having difficulty understanding native speakers, both face-to-face and on the phone. Students will benefit from listening activities that help them develop their ability to interpret fast speech.

Organizationally, the checklist structure is particularly vital to an ESL program where students have different tutors on different days. It's very important for tutors to be able to quickly ascertain what students have already worked on and what to do next.

Rationale based on research presented in literature review. Research indicates the importance of including controlled and guided activities (e.g., Baker, 2014; Couper, 2003; Derwing et al., 1998) in addition to providing opportunities for more interactive and communicative practice (e.g., Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Saito & Lyster, 2012). The importance of listening and perception activities in pronunciation teaching is also well-documented in research literature (e.g., Baker, 2014; Bradlow, Akahane-Yamada, Pisoni, & Tohkura, 1999; Gilbert, 1995; Gilbert, 1993; Murphy, 1991; Trofimovich et al., 2009). Research also supports the use of movement and gestures as aid to teaching and learning suprasegmental features of pronunciation (Acton, 2001; Baker, 2014; Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Gilbert, 2008; Graham, 1986; Haught & Mccafferty, 2008; Murphy, 2004; Smotrova, 2017).

Components of Part One: Introductory Workshop on Pronunciation

Next, I present the plan for the content of a 90-minute Introductory Workshop, which includes concise presentations (sometimes just awareness-raising so the activities and materials make sense) of the following broad topics: 1) *Why Pronunciation Matters*, 2) *Feeling Unprepared*, 3) *The Goal is Intelligibility*, 4) *Overview of Key Pronunciation Concepts*, 5) *"High Value" Sounds*, 6) *Correcting Pronunciation Errors*, 7) *Compensation Strategies*, 8) *Communicative Practice*, 9) *Online Resources*, and 10) *What Happens Next*. The topics are furthered discussed below, with more details provided in Appendix H.

1) Why Pronunciation Instruction Matters. The workshop begins with compelling examples from student interviews to alert tutors to how pronunciation issues impact their students' lives.

Rationale based on interview findings. All students reported having difficulties with common everyday activities because of their pronunciation issues. Students expressed that they want to develop more confidence and avoid embarrassment while speaking out in public.

Rationale based on research presented in literature review. Unsurprisingly, students in ESL programs staffed by volunteers experience challenges that are similar to those reported in studies of students taught by licensed teachers (Derwing, 2003; Derwing & Rossiter, 2002), such as embarrassment, sadness, and frustration.

2. Feeling Unprepared. This part of the workshop is included to assure tutors that they are not alone in their bewilderment about pronunciation instruction. Even trained ESL teachers express trepidation when they have to teach pronunciation. Some even report that they avoid it. Explain the *Pronunciation Teaching Paradox* (Darcy, 2018): Everyone knows it's important but no one feels confident teaching it.

Rationale based on interview findings. Tutors reported that they felt unprepared to offer support with pronunciation issues.

Rationale based on research presented in literature review. The extensive research evidence (e.g., Baker, 2014; Burgess & Spencer, 2000; Couper, 2017; Derwing, 2010; Derwing & Munro, 2005; Foote, Holtby, & Derwing, 2011; Levis, 2005; Macdonald, 2002; Murphy, 2014; Schaetzel & Low, 2009; Zielinski & Yates, 2014) that trained ESL teachers feel ill-equipped to teach pronunciation is, of course, echoed by volunteer tutors with no formal ESL

training. The "Pronunciation Teaching Paradox" described by Darcy (2018) states that while almost all teachers believe that pronunciation is a critical aspect of learning a language, most report feeling unprepared to teach it.

3. The Goal is *Intelligibility*. This part of the workshop emphasizes that nativelike pronunciation is not the goal. Intelligibility and ability to communicate is the goal.

Rationale based on research presented in literature review. Research supports the idea that nativelike pronunciation is an unrealistic and unnecessary goal. Intelligibility should be the paramount concern (e.g., Foote et al., 2011; Munro & Derwing, 1995; Timmis, 2002).

4. Brief Overview of Key Pronunciation Concepts. This portion of the workshop explains and gives examples of the difference between focusing on individual sounds (segmentals) and bigger picture components like stress and intonation (suprasegmentals). For example, tutors discuss the difference between sentences like "Mary's hat is BLUE" and "Mary's HAT is blue" to understand how English uses different word stress within a phrase, depending on context and meaning. Terms like *syllable, stress, accent, vowel, consonant,* and other frequently-used terms are clarified.

Rationale based on interview findings. Interview findings indicated that most tutors had little, if any, awareness of any suprasegmental aspects in their responses to interview questions.

Rationale based on research presented in literature review. Research indicates that it's worth taking time to go over basic terminology because many published materials overestimate what teachers know about pronunciation, making it difficult for an inexperienced teacher to grasp the key ideas (Zimmerman, 2018).

Brinton (2014) notes the importance of clarifying descriptive knowledge (terminology, basic facts) when learning about pronunciation instruction.

5. "High Value" Sounds. In this part of the workshop, tutors are introduced to the idea of functional load with the analogy of home owners improving their home so they can sell it for top dollar. Most home owners have neither the time nor the money to improve *everything*; they have to choose the improvement with the highest value. The same is true when choosing which sounds to focus on.

While concerns about "the th sound" are acknowledged (with assurances that the materials include *th* practice), this section of the workshop also takes time to explains why other sounds actually have higher value in terms of intelligibility, and that teachers and students mentioned those high value sounds in the interviews. Tutors are introduced to two charts entitled Vowel Challenges and Consonant Challenges showing functional load data intersected with which specific vowel and consonant sounds might be problematic for speakers from particular countries. (Currently, the native languages most represented at the ESL Program are French, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Turkish, Russian, and Farsi/Persian. These are the languages featured on the chart.)

Rationale based on interview findings. Tutors and students primarily expressed concerns about accurate production of the following phonemes: /θ/, /ð/, /ɹ/, /l/, /v/, /w/, /f/, and distinguishing between different vowel sounds, like /ɪ/ , /iː/, and /æ/, /e/.

Many tutors expressed that they would like to know which sounds are particularly difficult for students from the various countries that they interact with.

Rationale based on research presented in literature review. Research indicates that paying attention to functional load is an important part of planning a pronunciation curriculum (e.g., Brown, 1991; Derwing & Munro, 2005; Kang & Moran, 2014).

6. Correcting Pronunciation Errors. This portion of the workshop emphasizes that even though tutors may be reluctant to correct their students' pronunciation errors, appropriate feedback is very effective in helping students improve. One point of emphasis is that feedback needs to be explicit so that students know exactly what they are doing *right* as well as what they are doing *wrong*.

Rationale based on interview findings. Many tutors expressed concern about not knowing how (or if) they should correct their students pronunciation errors.

Rationale based on research presented in literature review. Research indicates that students benefit from (and generally want) explicit feedback, both positive and negative (e.g., Baker & Burri, 2016; Derwing et al., 1998; Ellis, 2009; Gordon & Darcy, 2016; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Kennedy & Trofimovich, 2010; Lyster, 2004; Saito & Lyster, 2012).

7. Compensation Strategies. This part of the workshop includes information about the importance of teaching and practicing compensation strategies that students can use when they are not understood or when they don't understand.

Rationale based on interview findings. All students shared stories of when they were frustrated in the community because the listener did not understand them. In addition, the 2 tutors with an ESL/speech degree emphasized the importance of students learning about how to use compensation strategies to improve their comprehensibility.

Rationale based on research presented in literature review. Research supports the teaching of compensation strategies as an important facet of a pronunciation program that is focused on intelligibility and effective communication (e.g., Jenkins, 2002; Lewis & Deterding, 2018; Smith, Meyers, & Burkhalter, 2007; Walker, 2010).

8. Communicative Practice. The workshop includes a sample activity that starts with a guided, step-by-step practice component with suggestions for ways to practice the skills with more interactivity and authenticity. While acknowledging that it might be tempting to skip the interactive part because the format is "messier" and less controlled (and tutors often run out of time), tutors are encouraged not to do so if at all possible.

Rationale based on interview findings. All tutors mentioned that they want more materials to use with their students. But because all activities are not created equal, tutors should be made aware of the importance of trying the more communicative aspects of the materials as well as the guided/controlled parts.

Students talked about not being able to communicate well outside the walls the predictable ESL classroom. They will benefit from more communicative practice.

Rationale based on research presented in literature review. Research indicates the importance of including controlled and guided activities (e.g., Baker, 2014; Couper, 2003; Derwing et al., 1998) in addition to providing opportunities for more interactive and communicative practice (e.g., Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Saito & Lyster, 2012).

9. Online Resources. The topic of online resources is a very broad topic, but the workshop simply touches on this as an awareness-raising exercise for the tutors. The workshop

emphasizes that tutors should encourage their students to practice outside of class, and online resources can provide opportunities to do that. (Tutors can also benefit from consulting online resources.) The workshop mentions a few online platforms that can be particularly useful for pronunciation, such as http://rachelsenglish.com/, https://learningenglish.voanews.com/, https://youglish.com/, TED talks, and Google translate.

Rationale based on interview findings. Tutors expressed interest in learning about resources available to them and their students.

Rationale based on research presented in literature review. Research indicates that using online resource to practice English outside of class is very helpful for increasing language proficiency (Schaetzel & Low, 2009; Shively, 2008; Yoshida, 2018).

10. What Happens Next? The last segment of the workshop explains the following: how to use the video tutorials and access the materials that accompany each topic, that the materials are designed to be used regularly as a brief (sometimes just 5-10 minute) component of a class, and that tutors shouldn't be afraid to repeat activities.

Rationale based on interview findings. Many tutors expressed interest in knowing how often, and for how much time, they should include explicit pronunciation practice in their classes.

Rationale based on research presented in literature review. Multiple studies point to the effectiveness of regular, ongoing pronunciation instruction (e.g., Derwing, Munro, & Wiebe, 1998; Gordon & Darcy, 2016; Lee et al., 2015; Thomson & Derwing, 2015; Trofimovich, Lightbown, Halter, & Song, 2009).

Components of Part Two: How to Help Your Students with Pronunciation

In the next section, I describe the broad topics of Part Two, How to Help Your Students with Pronunciation. This part makes up the heart of the what the tutors will actually be doing with their students. Following the schema described by Celce-Murcia et al. (2010, p. 221), the topics are divided into two broad categories.The first category includes *rule-governed* features of pronunciation, such as segmentals, word stress, and connected speech. The second category includes features that are *influenced by context and speaker intent*, such as primary phrase stress and intonation. While all units can be adapted for use with groups of various proficiency levels, it's likely that the rule-governed features will be more easily adaptable for beginning students, while the features influenced by context and speaker intent are likely more suitable for more advanced students.

The topics are: 1) vowels, 2), consonants, 3) syllable stress, 4) sentence stress/rhythm, 5) focus stress, 6) intonation, and 7) compensation strategies. Each of the first 6 topics include a brief (approximately 5-minute) video tutorial that explains and demonstrates that particular aspect of pronunciation. (The 7th topic, compensation strategies, was already discussed in the Introductory Workshop.) A written summary of each video tutorial is also available. After viewing each video, tutors can choose from an assortment of materials to use with their students. (This thesis includes a complete script for each video. The actual video production will take place at a later date.)

Below, I present a general plan for the content of each topic. Under each section of the plan, I reference aspects of the interview findings and/or sections of the literature review as the rationale for how and why those findings informed the plan. Detailed teaching materials for each topic can be found in Appendix H.

Note that the actual materials that will be presented to tutors (See Appendix H) are designed with a lay audience in mind and, while undergirded by research, do *not* include the research terminology that is summarized in the Rationale sections below.

Vowels. The Vowel Video and accompanying materials include information and materials about: 1) why vowels, in general, are difficult for most English learners, 2) the basics of tongue and mouth position, 3) what to call long and short vowels and why that matters, 4) the finishing "glide" of long vowels, 5) working with short vowels, 6) diphthongs and schwa, and 7) reviewing *Vowel Challenges,*the "high value" (functional load) chart presented in the Introductory Workshop.

Rationale based on interview findings. Students expressed difficulty with some vowel contrasts, namely /æ/ vs /ɛ/ (as in bad/bed) and /i/ vs /ɪ/ (as in feet/fit).

Tutors expressed that students have trouble with "vowels in general."

Rationale based on research presented in literature review. Important basics about vowels are documented in, for example, Gilbert (2001), Goodwin (2014), and Zielinski (2008). Functional load information is derived from Catford (1987), Brown (1991), and Kang & Moran (2014). And information about segmental difficulties based on L1 is based on research by Avery and Ehrlich (1992), Swan and Smith (2001), and Yavas (2011). In addition, several pronounciation textbooks were consulted for specifics about vowel production (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Gilbert, 2012; Grant, 2010; Hewings, 2004; Miller, 2007; Orion, 1997).

Consonants. The Consonant Video and accompanying materials include information and materials about: 1) voiced vs voiceless consonants, 2) the importance of ending (grammar)

sounds like /t/, /d/, /s/, 3) the role of vowel length, 4) the phonemes /r/ and /l/, 5) the dreaded "th" sound, 6) dealing with consonant clusters, and 7) reviewing *Consonant Challenges,* the "high value" (functional load) chart presented in the Introductory Workshop.

Rationale based on interview findings. Students expressed difficulty with some consonants, namely "that terrible th", /r/, and /l/.

Tutors expressed that students have trouble primarily with "th", and also mentioned /r/, /l/, /w/, and /v/.

Rationale based on research presented in literature review. Functional load information is derived from Catford (1987), Brown (1991), and Kang & Moran (2014), and information about segmental difficulties based on L1 is based on research by Avery and Ehrlich (1992), Swan and Smith (2001), and Yavas (2011). Information about "important final consonants" is addressed in Gilbert (2001), and Goodwin (2014). In addition, several pronounciation textbooks were consulted for specifics about consonant production (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Gilbert, 2012; Grant, 2010; Hewings, 2004; Miller, 2007; Orion, 1997).

Syllable Stress. The Syllable Stress Video and accompanying materials include information and materials about: 1) what syllable stress means and why it matters, 2) how to identify and produce syllable stress, and 3) some useful rules about syllable stress.

Rationale based on research presented in literature review. Important basics about syllable stress, particularly about listening for and producing vowel length, are documented in, for example, Gilbert (2001), Goodwin (2014), and Zielinski (2008). Refer to Gilbert (2001) for basics about teaching numbers of syllables, and Dickerson (1989) for word stress rules.

Sentence Stress/Rhythm. The Sentence Stress/Rhythm Video and accompanying materials include information and materials about: 1) content words and rhythm, 2) how we "squeeze" words into the rhythm of English, 3) common reduction strategies (using contractions, incorporating words like *gonna, wanna, hafta*), and 4) linking.

Rationale based on interview findings. Students reported that they often have trouble understanding native speakers because of their fast speech. Awareness and practice with the rhythm of English and the necessary reductions that that requires will help students improve their listening skills.

Rationale based on research presented in literature review. English emphasizes content words (Judy B Gilbert, 2001; Jenkins, 2002; Pennington & Ellis, 2000). The rhythm of English requires speakers to "squeeze in" some words by reducing them (Gilbert, 2008).

Focus Stress. The Focus Stress Video and accompanying materials include information and materials about: 1) thought groups, 2) emphasizing content words, 3) shifting focus stress for new/old information, and 4) shifting focus stress to disagree or correct information.

Rationale based on interview findings. Almost none of the tutors mentioned suprasegmental issues in their interviews. While they will likely notice prosodic features when explicitly pointed out, they may not be aware of how we rely on phrasal stress to express and understand meaning.

Rationale based on research presented in literature review. Thought groups are the building blocks of mastering prosody (Brinton, 2014), so it's important to make tutors and students aware of their role in spoken English.

Navigating primary phrase stress can be tricky for English learners because it's difficult to apply rules when in the middle of a conversation. Students can benefit from focusing on a few key situations that rely on primary phrase stress: Emphasizing content words, highlighting new information, and using focus stress to disagree or correct information (Hahn, 2004a; Levis, 2001; Levis & Grant, 2003).

Intonation. The Intonation Video and accompanying materials include information and materials about: 1) what intonation refers to and how it impacts meaning, 2) intonation for yes/no questions, 3) intonation for wh-questions, 4) intonation for choice questions, and 5) list intonation.

Rationale based on interview findings. Almost none of the tutors mentioned suprasegmental issues in their interviews. While they will likely notice prosodic features when explicitly pointed out, they may not be aware of how we rely on intonation to express and understand meaning.

Rationale based on research presented in literature review. Suprasegmental aspects, which include features like question intonation and list intonation, are a very important feature of pronunciation instruction because so much meaning is conveyed through intonation (Derwing & Rossiter, 2003; Derwing, 2003; Gordon & Darcy, 2016; Lee et al., 2015; Levis & Grant, 2003; McNerney & Mendelsohn, 1992).

Compensation Strategies. There is no video for compensation strategies, but there are printed materials that tutors can use with their students to help them practice strategies such as

paraphrasing, spelling or writing a word, volume adjustment, using a synonym, acting out a word, and contrasting a word with its opposite.

Rationale based on research presented in literature review. English learners need to learn compensation strategies to maximize their ability to commicate effectively (Jenkins, 2002; Lewis & Deterding, 2018; Smith, Meyers, & Burkhalter, 2007; Walker, 2010).

Components of Part Three: Reconvene, Review, and Share

After several months of watching videos and trying activities and materials with their students, tutors will reconvene to discuss what they learned, ask questions, and share new ideas. The materials for this section include guidance for leading a discussion with tutors about their experiences.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The abstract of this thesis stated that the ultimate aim of this project was to develop a program that would provide volunteers with a research-based foundation in pronunciation pedagogy that would ultimately help them provide more effective support for their students. Appendix H is the realization of that aim in a unique and important way. Yes, Appendix H includes explanations, tutorials, handouts, suggestions, tips, record-keeping charts—the whole package. But more importantly, the decisions made about the organization and content of the materials were the result of meshing existing research (cited in the literature review) with insights gained from this study's interview data. As a result, the project demonstrates how a project with a very practical, very applied outcome can be truly grounded in a research foundation.

Looking further at the culminating product, Appendix H, there are several issues to consider going forward. First, as a long-time teacher, I know full well that the evidence of accomplishing anything related to teaching is in the *enactment* of the plan, not just the *existence* of the plan. And so, for me, the concluding chapter of this type of work should be about the plans for making Appendix H come to life. Only by seeing the materials in action will we have a sense of whether tutors are truly able to offer more support to their students in the area of intelligible communication.

So what's next? This fall, I will return to the local community-based ESL program that sparked this project and put the program in place, pilot it for a semester. As a volunteer myself, I will have the opportunity to interact with other volunteers as well as students and get ongoing feedback about what worked well and what didn't, tweaking the materials as needed. I am currently considering several options to facilitate feedback. One possibility is to develop a short

"Rate the Effectiveness of this Activity" form for tutors to complete after using one of the activities. This form would also include space for tutors to add suggestions and other comments. Thinking ahead, compiling this type of ongoing feedback over a period of months would greatly enhance the discussions in Part Three: Reconvene, Review, Share.

However, before fall arrives, my first line of business is to develop more activities with beginning-level students in mind (i.e., those who would likely fall in the Novice category of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines.) While Appendix H certainly contains some materials that are appropriate for beginners, most of the activities include vocabulary that is more appropriate for high beginners through intermediate (and even some advanced) students. Creating additional materials will likely involve some brand new ideas as well as tweaking versions of some of the existing activities, but with more illustrations and simpler sentences with controlled vocabulary. Also, I intend to design more activities to add to the collection that focus more on communicative formats. Right now, as a basic curriculum that assumed very little tutor knowledge and experience in the area of teaching pronunciation, the bulk of the activities were intentionally controlled or guided in nature so that tutors wouldn't feel too far out of their comfort zone. I think it's possible that in an informal setting with volunteers, controlled/guided practice may feel like enough for classroom purposes, especially since this particular program includes a 20-minute social time each morning where students get together to be authentically "communicative". It will be interesting to see how things unfold, what kind of feedback I get, what seems to be missing, what needs to be revised.

Another aspect to consider for future development of Appendix H is how to incentivize and motivate volunteers to fully embrace the program—to watch the videos, to actually use the activities with their students, and to give feedback about the materials. One possibility is to

create a "certificate" program that volunteers can earn if they fully participate; another (and possibly the first line of defense) is to make sure that volunteer orientation meetings clearly emphasize that all volunteers are expected to watch the videos and try at least *x* number of activities within, say, a semester. In other words, I advocate that programs that use volunteers have an orientation session that is not afraid to convey, "*We're really glad you want to volunteer! But it's also important that we provide as much help to our students as we can, so we have some expectations…"*

In my community alone, there are several ESL programs staffed by volunteers, and I think it's safe to assume that the demand for this format for English instruction will continue, both here and around the country. Ultimately, if the materials in Appendix H prove to have merit in this upcoming "test" semester, my next task will be to determine how best to distribute the resources to more users. Some possibilities include: Presenting the materials at regional and national conferences to get the word out, providing the materials to other local community programs to pilot in exchange for their feedback, collaborating with the local university to further develop resources and a get-the-word-out plan, creating a personal website with links to the materials (perhaps a sample unit for free with a low cost payment/donation to receive access to the rest?) There are many possibilities to consider.

In addition to the issues related to the future editing and dissemination of Appendix H, there are larger issues brought to light by this project. First, we need more research about the how's, why's, and what's of ESL programs that are primarily run by volunteers. The statistics from Henrichsen (2010) indicated that such programs are ubiquitous and will likely remain a reality in the future. But currently, there is little/no research about this important area of ESL teaching and learning. How many community ESL programs are out there? What materials are

they using? Is anyone training the volunteers? If so, what is considered "important to know"? What results are these programs achieving? What is most important to students who attend community ESL programs? What is most important to the tutors? How are such programs funded? What resources are needed that aren't currently available? And the list of questions goes on!

I would also advocate that universities consider some level of involvement in volunteer-based ESL programs as part of their community outreach efforts. This could potentially take several forms, such as: Providing training for volunteers (geared to *volunteers*, not to degree-earning students), providing hosting space for materials (like Appendix H), coordinating efforts with local programs so that degree-seeking university students can learn from and contribute to the efforts of community ESL programs, providing assistance with grant-writing to help fund resources for community programs.

Finally, to end on a very personal note: Over the past few years, I have watched in sadness and frustration as the world (and this country in particular) becomes a less welcoming, less friendly place. And I think we all lose if that trend continues. Never before has communication been more important. For me, the opportunity to immerse myself in this project and to ultimately create something that can potentially play a small part in helping others communicate was a satisfying journey. I am very grateful.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

IRB EXEMPT APPROVAL (via email)

RPI Name: Dr. Randall Sadler
Project Title: *Teaching Pronunciation as a Volunteer ESL Tutor: Determining Needs and Designing Support*
IRB #: 18387
Approval Date: November 29, 2017

Thank you for submitting the completed IRB application form and related materials.Your application was reviewed by the UIUC Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS). OPRS has determined that the research activities described in this application meet the criteria for exemption at 45CFR46.101(b)(1, 2). This message serves to supply OPRS approval for your IRB application.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TUTORS

DEMOGRAPHICS

1. *How long have you been an ESL tutor?*
2. *Do you have any formal ESL training? If so, please describe.*
3. *Do you have any teaching experience in general? (In other words, have you taught other subjects or grade levels besides adult ESL?)*
4. *Do you speak any languages besides English?*

DESCRIBING PRONUNCIATION ISSUES

5. *Describe the pronunciation problems that your students have.*
6. *Is it harder/easier for you to understand students from some countries than from others? Please explain.*
7. *Do your students' pronunciation issues ever affect your ability to understand them? What do you do when don't understand them?*
8. *Do you think your students' pronunciation issues ever affect other students' ability to understand them? How do you handle that situation?*

KNOWLEDGE OF PRONUNCIATION PEDAGOGY

9. *How important is it to focus on pronunciation during ESL class?*
10. *How equipped do you feel to help your students with pronunciation issues?*
11. *How would you describe what makes someone's speech "understandable"?*
12. *What do you do when you are trying to teach someone how to pronounce a word or make a sound?*
13. *What would you like to learn regarding teaching pronunciation? What do you think would be useful to you and your students?*

SUGGESTIONS FOR FORMAT AND STRUCTURE OF TUTOR DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

14. *What suggestions do you have for how information and training about teaching pronunciation can be successfully shared with tutors?*

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

DEMOGRAPHICS

1. *What's your home country? Native language(s)?*
2. *How long have you been in the U.S.?*
3. *When did you start learning English?*
4. *Have you ever taken a class that focused on English pronunciation? Do you think it was helpful? If so, what was the most useful part of the course?*

DESCRIBING PRONUNCIATION ISSUES

5. *Why do you want to improve your English pronunciation?*
6. *What do you think is most difficult about English pronunciation? Give examples of things that are difficult for you.*
7. *Do you use any resources (books, apps, websites?) to improve your pronunciation? If so, what do you use?*
8. *Have you encountered any problems in your daily life because of pronunciation issues? Please explain.*
9. *Do you ever have trouble understanding native English speakers? If so, what about their speech makes it difficult for you to understand?*

APPENDIX D: DATA ANALYSIS – TUTORS

Experience	ESL/Speech Background		Teaching Experience (non-ESL)		No Teaching Experience		
Years tutoring in program	< 1 yr	> 1 yr	< 1 yr	> 1 yr	< 1 yr	> 1 yr	TOTALS
QUESTIONS 1–3: Experience/Years	1	1	1	9	2	6	20
QUESTION 4: Speak other languages?							
No other language	1	1	1	9	2	6	20
A very little bit of Spanish				1	1	1	3
QUESTION 5							
th		1	1	5	1	4	12
r, l	1		1	4	1	2	9
v, w				2			2
consonant clusters					1		1
endings (-ed, -s)	1	1		2		1	5
suprasegmental issues				3			3
dealing with silent letters				1			1
sounds not in their language						1	1
vowels			1	1		1	3
not moving mouth/lips enough						1	1
distinguishing minimal pairs			1	1			2
QUESTION 6							
yes	1	1	1	7	2	3	15
varies more by individ than country				2		3	5
Koreans are difficult	1	1	1	8	1	2	14
Japanese are difficult		1	1	5	2	2	11
Chinese are difficult	1		1	5	2	1	10
Congolese are difficult				1		1	2
Arabic speakers are difficult					1		1

Appendix D: Data Analysis – Tutors (Cont'd)

Experience	ESL/Speech Background		Teaching Experience (non-ESL)		No Teaching Experience	
Years tutoring in program	< 1 yr	> 1 yr	< 1 yr	> 1 yr	< 1 yr	> 1 yr
QUESTION 7						
yes	1	1	1	9	2	6
Ask to repeat		1	1	9	1	6
Ask someone else in the class		1	1	5	1	2
pretend I understand and move on						2
QUESTION 8						
Yes	1	1	1	9	2	6
Someone in class will jump in and help	1	1	1	8	2	5
Ask them to repeat	1	1	1	8	1	3
QUESTION 9						
somewhat important					1	1
important	1	1	1	4	1	4
very important				5		2
QUESTION 10						
Not at all, very unprepared	1		1	9	2	6
Prepared		1				
QUESTION 11						
segmental	1	1	1	6	1	5
suprasegmental		1		2		2
volume	1	1	1			2
rate	1	1		1		2
have to know context	1	1		1	1	1
moving mouth enough (not mumbling)			1	1		1
sounds like a NS as much as possible					1	

Appendix D: Data Analysis – Tutors (Cont'd)

Experience	ESL/Speech Background		Teaching Experience (non-ESL)		No Teaching Experience		
Years tutoring in program	< 1 yr	> 1 yr	< 1 yr	> 1 yr	< 1 yr	> 1 yr	TOTALS
QUESTION 12							
model/have them repeat	1	1	1	9	2	5	19
say it slowly			1	1	1	2	5
Write on board	1	1		3	2	2	9
break into parts				2	1	2	5
show in context		1			1	2	4
give details about mouth	1			6	1	1	9
use gestures to show emphasis				1			1
give more examples of sound		1		2			3
contrast with similar word				1		3	4
suggest a different word (avoid problem word)				1			1
QUESTION 13							
Specific problems by country				5	1	2	8
most helpful techniques to teach trickiest sounds		1	1	7	2	5	16
handbook of pron basics		1					1
activities for practice		1	1	6	2	6	16
consistent tchg across program				1			1
how to teach compensation strategies		1					1
reading activities and materials (rdg illuminates pron issues)				1		1	2
listening activities				3		1	4
how to break words apart						2	2

Appendix D: Data Analysis – Tutors (Cont'd)

Experience	ESL/Speech Background		Teaching Experience (non-ESL)		No Teaching Experience		
Years tutoring in program	< 1 yr	> 1 yr	< 1 yr	> 1 yr	< 1 yr	> 1 yr	TOTALS
QUESTION 13 cont'd							
how much to correct (or deal with not understanding) them without discouraging them	1		1				2
how much time to spend on pronunciation	1			1		1	3
word origins						1	1
cultural considerations when teaching				1			1
ANYthing!				2	1		3
QUESTION 14							
Should include activities that are quick and easy to do (perhaps daily)	1		1	6	2	6	16
not too time consuming, must be short and digestible	1	1	1	7	2	5	17
must accomodate the varying schedules of tutors				3		2	5
opportunity to see examples of what to do (video?)	1	1	1	6	2	3	14
opportunity to try things and then discuss it				2			2
need more things for Ss to read						2	2

APPENDIX E: DATA ANALYSIS – STUDENTS

QUESTION/RESPONSES	NUMBER OF STUDENTS (out of 11 total)
Question 3: Pronunciation focus when learning English in home country?	
No, only focused on reading/writing/grammar	11
Question 4: Taken pronunciation course?	
Yes, at local school district (paid for class)	4
No	7
Question 5: Why improve pronunciation?	
Need to be understood in the community	8
Embarrassed when I mispronouce	4
improve job prospects when back in home country	1
make friends	6
have confidence	6
to study in US someday (or now)	3
more important than a big vocab	1
so I can talk on the phone	1
Question 6: Difficult words/sounds	
th	10
distinguishing short vowel sounds	3
r, l	5
f, v	3
p	1
t, d	1
rhythm issues	2
word stress	2
silent letters	1
consonant clusters with r (pr, tr, br)	1
pronouncing correctly within a sentence (not just word in isolation)	1
fit/feet distinction	1
butter vs "budder" (city/ciddy)	1

Appendix E: Data Analysis – Students (Cont'd)

QUESTION/RESPONSES	NUMBER OF STUDENTS (out of 11 total)
Question 7: Resources Used	
Audio function on Google Translate	8
various youtube channels	3
duolingo	1
watch TV	1
dictionary with audio	1
movies	1
VOA	3
TED	1
Rachel's english	1
Question 8: Problems encountered	
talking on the phone (so avoid it)	5
ordering in restaurant	1
understanding and expressing self to doctor/pharmacist/health insurance	4
understanding secretary at language program	1
Expressed feeling embarrassed or crying	3
driver's license story	1
shopping and couldn't ask for help	1
talking to fellow students or advisor	1
Question 9: Difficulty understanding NS when...	
Young people speak fast	4
Young people don't care/notice that you can't understand	3
Phrasal verbs, idioms	5
talk too fast	9
have unfamiliar accent	5
mumbling (like a bus driver)	1
reductions (wanna)	1

APPENDIX F:
TUTOR RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Total number of participants: 20 (5 male, 15 female)

Compiled responses to Interview Questions 1–4

Number of participants with:

ESL/Speech background (degree in ESL or speech pathology)	2
Teaching experience (other than ESL)	10
No teaching experience	8
Less than 1 year of tutoring experience in the ESL program	4
More than 1 year of tutoring experience in the ESL program	16

Number of participants who:

Report that they "speak another language"	0
Report knowing enough Spanish to have a "very simple conversation"	3

Mean years tutoring in ESL Program: 3 years

Compiled responses to Interview Questions 5–14

5. Describe the pronunciation problems that your students have.

Out of 20 participants:

- **90%** (18) mentioned at least one **segmental issue**
  - 60% (12) mentioned "th"
  - 45% (9) mentioned r or l
  - 10% (2) mentioned v, w
  - 15% (3) mentioned "vowels in general"
- **15%** (3) mentioned **suprasegmental issues** (syllable stress, intonation)
  - All 3 had teaching experience but no ESL training, and were tutors for >1 year.
- OTHER:
  - Endings (-ed, -s, etc.) (25% - 5)
  - Consonant clusters (5% - 1)
  - Dealing with silent letters (5% - 1)
  - Not moving lips enough (5% - 1)

6. Is it harder/easier for you to understand students from some countries than from others? Please explain.

Out of 20 participants:

- **75%** (15) responded "yes"

    - Students with the following L1s were mentioned by at least 10 tutors: Korean, Chinese, Japanese
- **25%** (5) responded that it varies more by individual than by country.

7. Do your students' pronunciation issues ever affect your ability to understand them? What do you do when don't understand them?

Out of 20 participants:

- **100%** (20) responded "yes"
    - Responses to "what do you do" included: Ask them to repeat (90% - 18), ask someone else in the class if he/she understands (50% - 10); pretend I understand and just move on (10% - 2).

8. Do you think your students' pronunciation issues ever affect other students' ability to understand them? How do you handle that situation?

Out of 20 participants:

- **100%** (20) responded "yes"
    - Responses to "how do you handle that" included: Usually someone else in the class will jump in and help (90% - 18)**;** ask them to repeat (75% - 15),

9. How important is it to focus on pronunciation in ESL class?

Out of 20 participants:

- **90%** (18) said pronunciation instruction was either "important" or "very important"

10. How equipped do you feel to help your students with pronunciation issues?

Out of 20 participants:

- **95%** (19) responded "not at all", "very unprepared"
- **5%** (1) responded "I feel prepared"
    - Participant had a degree in Speech pathology.

11. What makes someone "understandable"?

Out of 20 participants:

- **75%** (15) mentioned **segmental issues** ("making all the sounds right", "being able to say the sounds in English that they don't have in their language"...)
- **25%** (5) mentioned **suprasegmental issues**. Of those 5:
    - 1 has ESL training
    - 4 have been tutoring for >3 years
- **25%** (5) mentioned volume and/or rate
- **25%** (5) mentioned that the listener needs to know the context
- OTHER:
    - Moving their mouth enough (15% - 3)
    - Sound like a native speaker as much as possible (5% - 1)

12. What do you do when you are trying to teach someone how to pronounce a word or make a sound?

Out of 20 participants:

- **90%** (18) - mode**l** the correct way and have students repeat
- **45%** (9) - write the word on the board (and then model/repeat)
- **45%** (9) - provide some information about lips/tongue placement or say "watch my mouth"
- **5%** (1) - use gestures to show emphasis (word/syllable stress)
- **25%** (5) - break the word into parts
- **25%** (5) - say it slowly for the student
- **20%** (4) - write or say the word in context (in a sentence)
- **20%** (4) - explicitly contrast the word/sound with a similar word/sound
- OTHER
    - Give more examples of words with the sound (15% - 3)
    - Suggest a different word to use to avoid problem sound (5% - 1)

13. What would you like to learn regarding teaching pronunciation? What do you think would be useful to you and your students?

Out of 20 participants:

- **80%** (16) would like to learn the best techniques to teach segmentals ("the trickiest sounds")
- **80%** (16) would like to learn about practice activities that they can incorporate in their classes (right now, they only have access to handouts about minimal pairs).
- **40%** (8) would like to learn which sounds are particularly difficult for various L1s so they are aware of what to focus on with their group of students.
- Both of the tutors with an ESL background mentioned that tutors would benefit from learning how to teach compensation strategies to their students.
- OTHER:
    - Learn how much time tutors should spend on pronunciation in each class (15% - 3)
    - Learn how to correctly break words apart (15% - 3)
    - Learn about using reading aloud to teach pronunciation, particularly as a way to hear where students are having problems (10% - 2)
    - Learn how much to correct students (or how to deal with not understanding students) without discouraging them (10% - 2)
    - Learn about cultural considerations when teaching (5% - 1)
    - Develop a handbook of pronunciation basics for tutors (5% - 1)

14. What suggestions do you have for how information and training about teaching pronunciation can be successfully shared with tutors?

Out of 20 participants:

- **85%** (17) - Should not be too time-consuming or overload with information, must be "short and digestible"

- **80%** (16) - Should provide information about activities that tutors can routinely with their students
- **70%** (14) - Would be helpful to see examples of the activities/techniques (e.g., via video or by watching someone else demonstrate)
- **25%** (5) - Must accommodate the varying schedules of the tutors
- OTHER:
    - Should include ways to provide more reading materials for students (10% - 2)
    - Should include opportunity to discuss successes and challenges with other tutors (10% - 2)

APPENDIX G:
STUDENT RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Total number of participants: 11 (2 male, 9 female)

Compiled responses to Interview Questions 1–4

Country of Origin	Native Language(s)	Number of students
Democratic Republic of Congo	French, Swahili, Lingala	1
South Korea	Korean	1
Brazil	Portuguese	3
Peru	Spanish	1
Iran	Farsi/Persian	1
Belarus	Russian/Belarussian	1
Japan	Japanese	1
China	Chinese	1
Turkey	Turkish	1

Previous English learning experiences:

- 11 students (100%) began learning English in middle school or high school, in classes held 2–3 times per week, with focus on grammar and reading. Very little, if any, time was spent on pronunciation/speaking/listening
- 4 students had taken a basic pronunciation class (that they paid for) that was offered by a local school district

Compiled responses to Interview Questions 5–9

5. Why do you want to improve your pronunciation?

- **91%** (10) - to have more confidence and avoid embarrassment while speaking
    - 55% (6) - to have more confidence when speaking
    - 36% (4) - to avoid feeling embarrassed and nervous
- **73%** (8) - to be understood during daily life in the community
- **55%** (6) - to make friends
- OTHER
    - 27% (3) - to be able to study in the U.S. someday
    - 9% (1) - to improve my job prospects upon return to home country
    - 9% (1) - so I can talk on the phone

6. What do you think is most difficult about English pronunciation? Give examples of things that are difficult for you.

- **91%** (10) - the "th" sound
- **66%** (6) - /r/ and /l/
- **36%** (4) - Distinguishing vowel sounds (e.g., bad/bed; feet/fit)

- **36%** (4) mentioned issues related to stress and intonation
    - All 4 of the students who mentioned suprasegmental issues had taken a pronunciation class at the fee-based Adult Education Program.
- OTHER
    - 32% (3) - /f/ and /v/
    - 9% (1) mentioned the following:
        - Dinguishing /t/ and /d/
        - /p/
        - Dealing with silent letters
        - "American" way to say butter, city, pretty, party (flap /t/)

7. Do you use any resources (books, apps, websites?) to improve your pronunciation? If so, what do you use?

- **73%** (8) - Google translate (audio function)
- **27%** (3) - VOA recordings online
- **27%** (3) - various YouTube channels
- OTHER - 9% (1) mentioned:
    - Duolingo
    - English language television shows
    - English language movies
    - TED talks (using the transcript)
    - Rachel's English

8. Have you encountered any problems in your daily life because of pronunciation issues? Please explain.

- **82%** (9) - reported a difficult situation encountered during daily life activities such as: ordering in a restaurant, dealing with health care issues, obtaining a driver's license, registering for classes, shopping
- **45%** (5) - reported difficulties talking on the phone (to the point that they avoided it)
- **27%** (3) - reported feelings of embarrassment and shame when they cannot be understood

9. Do you ever have trouble understanding native English speakers? If so, what about their speech makes it difficult for you to understand?

All students (100%) responded that they often have difficulty understanding native English speakers. They identified these areas of difficulty:

- **100%** (11) - talk too fast
- **45%** (5) - use unfamiliar phrasal verbs or idioms
- **45%** (5) - have an unfamiliar accent (e.g., Southern, East Coast, African American)
- **9%** (1) - don't speak clearly (mumbling) - like "bus drivers sometimes"
- **9%** (1) - use reductions (wanna, gonna, etc)

APPENDIX H:
PRONUNCIATION TEACHING MATERIALS DESIGNED FOR VOLUNTEER ESL TUTORS AND THEIR ADULT STUDENTS

Appendix H is a 230-page document entitled, *Pronunciation Teaching Materials Designed for Volunteer ESL Tutors and Their Adult Students.*

Appendix H contains all the professional development and teaching materials described in this thesis.

Appendix H can be found here in PDF format:
https://uofi.box.com/s/aa0g8gci30myxkgzicrkzoz4qewybkcf

The Materials include explanations, instructions, scripts for videos (to be produced at a later date), and handouts that cover the following topics:

- Introductory Workshop on Pronunciation Teaching
- Vowels
- Consonants
- Syllable Stress
- Sentence Stress & Rhythm
- Focus Stress
- Intonation
- Compensation Strategies
- Guide to Part Three: Reconvene, Review, Share